

## “The entire people removed the gold rings that were in their ears and brought them to Aharon.” (32:3)

Is this not the way it usually is? – the *nouveau riche* take their money and throw it around. In a public display of their insecurity, those who have suddenly come into wealth – or even those who have been raised in opulence – will sometimes use their wealth to make a statement, to impress their opinion upon others, or simply to extract honor and respect. Wealth can and should be used to attain positive goals. There are so many who do so. For some reason, those who lack the astuteness and self-esteem to use their money wisely seem to overshadow the rest. *Klal Yisrael* had recently been liberated from Egypt after suffering two hundred years of backbreaking, degrading labor. They left wealthy, and they added to their newly found wealth at the *Yam Suf*, when the Egyptians drowned. They should have exhibited gratitude to the Almighty who gave them everything; to Moshe *Rabbeinu*, their quintessential leader who did so much for them; to Aharon *HaKohen*, who was not only a leader, but also their friend. The money went to their collective heads, however, and they lost it.

It seems like history repeats itself – which it does. *Klal Yisrael* gets a little bit of money and lo and behold, “*Va’yishman Yeshurun va’yivat*,” “*Yeshurun/Yisrael waxed fat and rebelled*” (*Devarim* 32:15). Is this the way it has to be?

In *Parashas Bo* (11:2), Hashem instructed Moshe *Rabbeinu*, “Please speak in the ears of the people, and let each man ask from his neighbor and each woman from her neighbor utensils of silver and gold.” *Rashi* cites *Chazal* in the *Talmud Berachos* 9a who say that Hashem asked Moshe using the word *na*, which means please, as if it were a special request: “Please ask the people to request these silver and gold vessels.” We can understand that when we ask a person to undertake a mission of some difficulty we say, “please.” In this case, Hashem was requesting that they appropriate the Egyptian silver and gold. Is that so difficult? Do people have to be convinced to take money? Why, then, did Hashem emphasize, “please”?

The *Gerrer Rebbe, z.l.*, the *Bais Yisrael*, explains that *Klal Yisrael* were acutely aware that taking money is not a simple endeavor. This would be the newly liberated Jewish slaves’ first encounter with the challenges that arise from money. They understood that the temptations that presented themselves with money could, at times, be overwhelming. This is why Hashem had to say, “Please take the money.”

The *Rebbe* adds that for this reason they were told to “borrow” the money. Hashem felt that Jews should view material wealth as being on loan to them temporarily. When a person has something on loan, his excitement about the possession is limited due to its temporal nature. The *pasuk* teaches us how to view materialism: as something that has been borrowed – something which, at anytime, can be taken away from him.

Returning to the *pasuk* in *Sefer Devarim* 32:15 which describes *Klal Yisrael's* inability to cope with the challenge of material wealth, *Sforno* explains that the *pesukim* are telling us that when *Klal Yisrael* falls prey to materialism and affluence, when they turn towards physical gratification as a way of life, ignoring the spiritual dimension, there is only one antidote: exile. Only exile with its consequent poverty and depravation relieve the symptoms of physical indulgence.

Addressing the words of *Sforno*, *Horav Elya Svei, Shlita*, notes that we have endured numerous "exiles" during the last 2,000 years of *galus*, exile. There has been one common denominator throughout these various stages of exile: poverty. We have always been poor. While there have been individual Jews, specific periods and certain areas throughout history for whom this has not been case, for the most part, the Jews, have been poor throughout their bitter exile. We have only to peruse history, to view pictures, to research the museums, and we will see one thing: poverty. This was Hashem's therapy, His method of rectifying our past.

This would all be fine if Europe had been the last stop in our exile. It was not destined to be. It is well known that *Rav Chaim Volozhiner, z.l.*, predicted that America would be our last exile before the advent of *Moshiach*. Hopefully, this is our last exile as we prepare for *Moshiach Tzidkeinu* to herald the Final Redemption. What about the poverty? We may not all be wealthy, but does one really see here in America the abject poverty that defined the European exile? True, there are many Jews who barely scrape out a living, but it is a far cry from Europe. Who ever heard of a *chasson* not having a new suit for his wedding? We are not talking Armani, but in Europe it was not unheard of for a *chasson* not to have new clothes for his wedding. Why is America different? Is not poverty an essential requisite of *galus*?

*Horav Svei* suggests that the European Holocaust, the cataclysmic tragedy that destroyed such a large portion of our People, must have been the final atonement for the sin of "*Va'yishman Yeshurun*." We have paid our dues. We have been poor long enough. We can now have affluence once again. Luxury is no longer a dream. It can be a reality. We have a new opportunity to live as we did thousands of years ago.

The American exile is our chance to experience material wealth and pleasure and to see if we can now rise to the challenge without succumbing to its blandishments. The American exile affords the opportunity for nice homes, cars, food on the table and money in the bank – and not to rebel. We have paid the terrible price of rebellion for 2,500 years. We have lived in exile under the most primitive and poverty-stricken conditions, all because we did not know how to deal with the temptations that arise from wealth. Can we learn to use this opportunity of material blessing for a positive purpose, to spread Torah, perform acts of loving-kindness, and raise the banner of Hashem throughout the world? Time will tell. We must remember, however, it is a test that we must pass.